

There has been a great deal of conversation surrounding the eight reform measures that could dramatically reduce police violence. Many have understandably questioned how these apply to the operations of the Westport Police Department. With those questions in mind, the following briefly details those measures as they compare to our current policy and training standards.

Speaking generally, the department is governed by a very strict use of force policy that provides detailed guidance on how and when force can be applied. There is a general use of force policy, as well as additional policies for other force weapons/options provided to our officers governing their specific use.

1 – Chokeholds and strangleholds are not permitted by policy. The only exception to this mentioned in our policy is if the situation would warrant the use of deadly force. This is not a tactic that our officers train on, but again would be a last resort in a situation where deadly force would otherwise be warranted.

2 – Our officers receive extensive training in de-escalation tactics in connection with various other training topics, most notably with all use of force training including firearms training and any training associated with responding to and dealing with persons suffering from emotional distress, mental health issues, intellectual disabilities such as Autism, and the like. Police officers on the whole are trained to always seek to attempt to use verbal communication and/or verbal commands to attempt to de-escalate situations and/or gain compliance prior to being put into a position that would require the application of any type of physical force. Voluntary compliance is obviously the best case scenario outcome of any given situation, as it maximizes the safety of the officer and the individual with whom we are engaged, but is obviously not always possible to gain. In general, the use of force is either a last resort when all other options to gain this voluntary compliance have been exhausted or is applied when immediately necessary to prevent imminent or on-going/continued harm to the subject of the interaction, an officer or a bystander, or in some cases to prevent damage to property.

3 – When tactically feasible, an officer will identify himself/herself as a police officer and issue verbal commands and warnings prior to the use of any force. When feasible, an officer will allow the subject an opportunity to comply with the officers verbal commands before using any type of force, especially deadly force and/or the discharging of a firearm. A verbal warning is not required in circumstances where the officer has to make a split second decision, or if the officer believes that issuing the warning would place the safety of the officer or others in imminent jeopardy.

4 – Per policy, deadly force is only justified when the officer reasonably believes such force is necessary to defend the officer, or a third person, from the imminent threat of death or serious physical injury or to effect the arrest or prevent the escape from custody of a person whom they reasonably believe has committed, or attempted to commit a felony involving the infliction or threatened infliction of serious physical injury and the officer reasonably believes this person still poses a significant threat of death or serious physical injury to the officer or other persons. The policy declares that where feasible, the officer should give warning prior to the use of deadly physical force. Deadly force cannot be used against unarmed, non-violent property crime offenders.

5 – Our officers are trained to intervene if they feel they are witnessing an excessive force situation and required to do so by precedent set in state and federal case law. Employees are required by policy to report misconduct of their fellow officers. Failure to act can and will result in administrative and/or criminal penalties. Language to this effect is also included in the department's use of force policy.

6 – Shooting at or from moving vehicles is strictly prohibited by policy unless officers reasonably believe deadly force is necessary to defend the officer or a third person from the use, or imminent use, of deadly force.

7 – Our policies and more specifically our use of force training do not reflect a strict use of force continuum, but instead provide a number of force options based on the threat level that is being encountered. To employ a policy which requires a strictly prescribed hierarchy of force options that must be employed in a specific order could ultimately result in the unnecessary applications of force. Officers are trained to transition to other use of force options and/or to cease the use of force based on the actions and level of compliance of the subject.

8 - Our employees must complete a departmental use of force form whenever they use force against a suspect above the level of unresisted handcuffing. Simply drawing and pointing a firearm or Taser also requires the completion of a use of force form. All uses of force are reviewed twice; once by a patrol supervisor and second by our Professional Standards Captain.

Many have also had inquiries about body worn camera systems, and more specifically, whether the police department currently employs them. The answer is yes, all officers assigned to patrol are equipped with a body worn camera, the mandatory use of which is governed by department policy. The Westport Police Department is committed to the belief that on-officer audio/video is an important and valuable tool for law enforcement. On-officer video is essentially audio-video documentation of a police officer's investigative and enforcement activities from the perspective of the officer's person. The use of on-officer video results in greater transparency, more effective prosecution, and improved protection against false allegations of excessive use of force, misconduct or racial profiling.

The use of body-worn camera systems provides documentation of law enforcement interaction with the public by providing recorded evidence of actions, conditions and statements that may be used for court proceedings, internal review, or review by the public through formal request. Goals of a body-worn camera system are for officer safety, to accurately document events during the course of an incident, to provide prosecutors with the best evidence for court proceedings, and to determine the accuracy of complaints made against a member of the Westport Police Department. The Westport Police Department utilizes the VIEVU camera system.

This department is very far ahead of the national curve in that it has already proactively (and in many cases long since) adopted many of the reform measures currently being suggested, discussed and advocated for. It is important to note that the Westport Police Department is an accredited law enforcement agency through the Connecticut Police Officer Standards and Training Council and that this is a voluntary process. A link to the Connecticut Police Officer Standards and Training Council website specific to what this process entails is a good place to begin learning more about it and can be found at <https://portal.ct.gov/POST/Accreditation-Division/Accreditation-Division>. Clicking on the accreditation index link brings up a series of additional links to pages which provide specific information on what all of this means and how the process works. Westport has already been awarded Tier 1 accreditation and is currently in the process of additionally obtaining Tier 2 status, both of which are explained in greater detail.

In short, this is all very important because it means that Westport Police operations are guided by strict policies based on current best practices and pertinent legal updates. Accreditation must be

maintained and re-certified every three years, and is therefore a continuous on-going process of not only proving policies are being followed but also consistently re-examining policies and making necessary changes. For this reason, the department employs an officer who is titled as the accreditation manager to oversee this process with the Connecticut Police Officer Standards and Training Council providing ultimate oversight of awarding certification. Per accreditation standards policies and procedures are being reviewed and adapted to reflect an ever-changing world, the incorporation of new technology and techniques, changing legislation, legal updates and decisions, etc.

Accreditation is enhanced and driven by the training component of this police department, which is not only essential for officers maintaining certification, but is also a vehicle for implementing and instructing our officers on practical applications of policy changes. Officers' training here at this department annually exceeds the basic standards set forth for simple recertification. Again, the key takeaway is that our officers are very well trained and closely supervised by carefully formulated policies as their guide.